

TRAUMA-INFORMED PARENT/CAREGIVER LEADER ENGAGEMENT

Developed by Family Hui, a Program of Lead4tomorrow

Being a trauma/healing informed organization is a journey not a destination. This process requires ongoing reflection as an organization's and parent/caregiver's circumstances change. It is essential to wrestle with and incorporate trauma and healing informed principles/practices internally before organizations can effectively apply the principles to engage parents/caregivers. Moreover, offering venues and opportunities for input and ideas from parents/caregivers is an essential part of being trauma/healing informed and programmatically effective.

As the value of incorporating parent voices into the work of organizations serving children and families is increasingly recognized (such as on working groups, committees or advisory councils), and more opportunities emerge, this document provides a guide for incorporating trauma/healing informed practices in those settings.

1. Leadership Terminology. Using the term leadership can be intimidating to some parents depending on their background and experiences. For others, it is simply not the lens that informs their actions. For many parents, leadership simply begins with taking responsibility for themselves, then advancing to their families, and perhaps growing into advocating for their family and children within their community. Therefore, even how "leadership" opportunities for parent involvement are described is an important consideration.

2. Assessment. An assessment of the circumstances of families being served is an important starting point. What are the needs, dynamics, and characteristics of the parents, families, and community being served? How can more equitable and culturally relevant engagement opportunities be designed and developed? What venues exist where parents can be engaged to gain a greater understanding of policies and resources that impact them and their children, and where they can provide input on their needs? What more can be done to help parents become advocates for their children? How can parent input be solicited to increase the effectiveness of parent/caregiver engagement?

3. Planning. Work with parents before processes begin to foster parent/organization collaboration and be open to alternative forms of engagement. Plan the time and location with varied work schedules, childcare needs, and transportation needs in mind. Time and location are crucial determinants in the success of parent engagement activities.

4. Partnering. Work with organizations to identify opportunities – at the state, regional and local levels – where parent voices should be included and where they can play an active role advocating for child well-being.

5. Preparation. Bringing parents into these positions can be especially challenging for those with little leadership experience or with little experience interfacing with institutions; these dynamics can be intensified when the individuals asked to serve are wary of institutions given previous experiences or perceptions. Effort is, therefore, needed to prepare parents for the role they are being asked to fill, this includes providing an orientation by the sponsoring organization, reviewing meeting agendas and minutes, and helping parents prepare for upcoming meetings. These are crucial steps, especially when parents are introduced into an ongoing process.

6. Respect. Ensure parents feel engaged in respectful and meaningful ways. On an ongoing basis obtain feedback from parents on their experience and how their participation can be more effective and impactful, this includes regular check-ins before and after meetings to make sure they're engaged with the project and addressing concerns as they arise.

7. Evaluation. On an ongoing basis evaluate the substantive impacts from the process. Apply adaptive management/collaborative practices to modify the process as needed to more effectively meet its objectives and ensure meaningful parent involvement. Poor follow-through and lack of impact can lead to disenchantment and failed processes.

Becoming a trauma/healing informed organization requires ongoing commitment and adaptation. As opportunities emerge for creating space to hear parent voices and respond to their needs in meaningful ways, applying the concepts of community, compassion, and empathy, as represented in this framework, provide a solid foundation.

Family Hui supports, encourages, and empowers parents/caregivers as they face the joys and challenges of raising children and learn how to address challenges in healthy ways. For more information, visit: <https://www.familyhui.org/>